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From mission to Cathedral

**From  
Mission  
to  
Cathedral**





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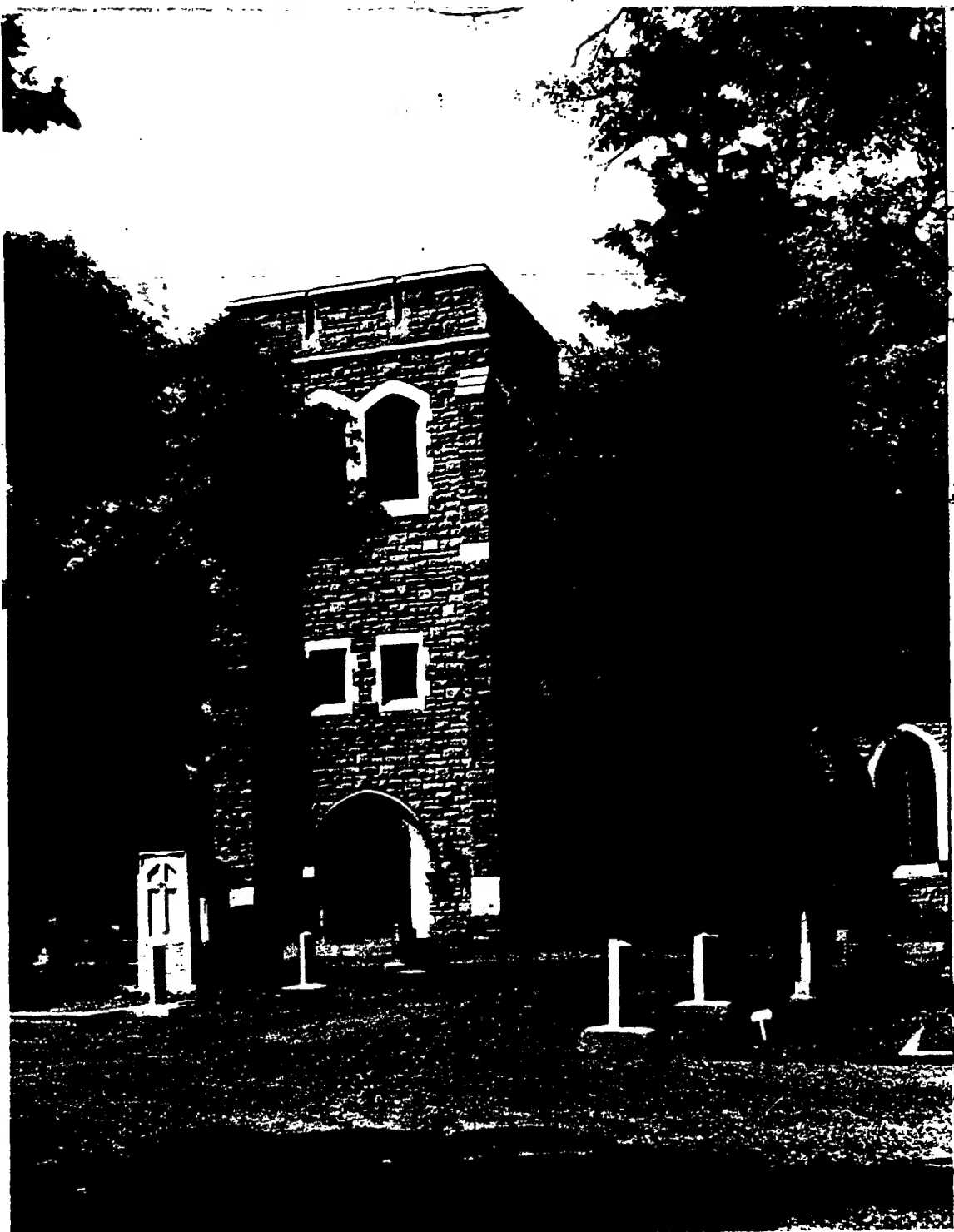
# From Mission to Cathedral



REV. JOHN WEST



Published by the Wardens and Vestry of  
St. John's Cathedral to commemorate the One  
hundred and Twenty-fifth anniversary of the  
arrival of the Rev. John West, first Protestant  
missionary to the Red River Settlement, Octo-  
ber 14, 1820.



ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL, WINNIPEG, ERECTED IN 1926

# The Red River Mission



HE site of St. John's Cathedral is a link with the historic past, for it was there that the first Anglican Minister in Western Canada built his mission. The story of the Rev. John West's work among the settlers and the natives in the Red River Settlement will long be an inspiration to all who labour in the cause of Christianity.

John West was born in Farnham, Surrey, a short distance from London, England. That he should have entered the Church is not surprising since Farnham was a community under religious influence. There the castle of the Bishop of Winchester was located. It was also the site of the first Cistercian house in England, Waverley Abbey, the ruins of which may still be seen.

It is not known just how he came to the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company as a candidate for its newly-created Chaplaincy. Their choice however was a wise one for John West was a member of the Church Missionary Society and had already acquired considerable knowledge of the native races of North America. Certainly, it was no desire for adventure which prompted him to accept the position, for he was already a man of forty-five years of age, happily married with a wife and three young children. His decision to make the perilous ocean voyage to endure the hardships and dangers of life in a prairie settlement was made primarily because he saw in the Chaplaincy an opportunity to share in the work of ministering to the neglected Indians.

Thus, on the twenty-seventh day of May, 1820, the Rev. John West boarded the little sailing ship Eddystone and bade farewell to England and all he held dear.

## The Arrival

After a long tedious voyage, York Factory, on the shore of Hudson's Bay came into view. The land about York was flat with bare granite rocks, swamp and muskeg, where mosquitoes swarmed in profusion. Nevertheless, the sight of York Factory stirred in John West's bosom "sentiments of gratitude to God for the protecting Providence through the perils of the ice and of the sea."

At that time, York Factory was the main centre of the Hudson's Bay Company's interests. There, for nearly 150 years, trading and bartering had been carried on, yet no facilities had been provided for the worship of God. Finally, on an eventful Sunday in August, 1820, "arrangements were made for the attendance of the Company Servants at Divine Worship."

Not content with holding Sunday services, John West turned his attention to two other fields — the children of white men and Indian women, and those of purely Indian parentage. The former came within the scope of his duties as the Hudson's Bay Company's Chaplain, but the latter was purely a matter of his own concern, arising from his loyalty to the service of his Communion and his connection with the Church Missionary Society.

For the half-breed children, he conceived a plan whereby 100 of them from scattered posts would be brought to the Red River, housed and maintained at the Hudson's Bay Company's expense and educated under his direction. Previous attempts on the part of the Company to educate these children had met with little success. The new plan, however, was

approved by the Governor at York Factory, who forwarded it at once to the offices of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, England.

The Indian children presented a different problem in that the Hudson's Bay Company assumed no financial responsibility and funds would have to be obtained from other sources. Nevertheless, he pursued the same policy of concentration with the Indian children as with the half-breeds — education at a common centre. Obviously this plan would be even more difficult to accomplish with the Indians. For one thing the Indian tribes were wanderers by nature and John West first had to learn whether Indians would turn over their children for a scheme of this kind. Without delay he put this issue to the test and he succeeded in persuading an Indian named Withaweecono to allow one of his sons to accompany the Missionary to the Red River settlement.

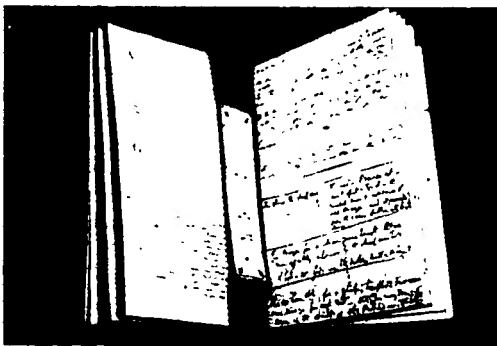
After two crowded weeks spent at York Factory, the month of September was at hand and the long, tedious journey to the Red River had to be made without delay. The last letters home were written, a canoe was loaded with tents, blankets and provisions and experienced canoe men assembled. Governor Williams accompanied Rev. John West to the water's edge as Withaweecono and his two wives arrived with the son who was to accompany the party. Then, with tearful farewell, they departed.

A journey of 800 miles lay ahead of them, up swift streams with many rapids and falls to negotiate. After days of strenuous paddling the party arrived at Norway House, then an important inland post of the Hudson's Bay Company, and another Indian lad was secured there to accompany little Withaweecono to the Red River. These boys were later baptized, one of them being named Henry Budd, after the Rev. West's old Rector in England, and later became the first ordained Clergyman of pure Indian blood in what are now the Prairie Provinces. According to record H. Budd preached in the Upper Settlement Church (St. John's) in the afternoon of the day that Bishop Mountain returned to Montreal from the Red River Settlement (1844).

From Norway House, the journey south over Lake Winnipeg was made by York boat. Disaster nearly overtook the craft after half the distance had been covered, when it ran foul of a sunken rock. For a while, all seemed lost, but prompt action saved the day and the craft arrived at the mouth of the Red River on October 13th, 1820, without further incident. At Netley Creek they found an Indian encampment, the headquarters of Peguis, Chief of the Saulteaux Indians, who breakfasted with them. Besides being a true friend of the white man, Peguis was one of the first Indians in Western Canada to be converted to Christianity.

The following night the party camped near the Grand Rapids, now

#### REV. JOHN WEST'S PRAYER BOOK



known as St. Andrew's. In the morning, the last-stage of the long voyage began. Finally, around a bend in the river, John West beheld the wooden palisade of Fort Douglas.

Fort Douglas was neither one of the oldest nor one of the most important posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. Nevertheless, it was the centre of the Red River territory. Besides being the residence of the Chief Factor for the Red River Settlement, it was the destination of fur canoes from Brandon



FORT DOUGLAS, FROM A PAINTING BY  
V. A. LONG, IN THE WINNIPEG PUBLIC LIBRARY

Lord Selkirk from Eastern Canada for protection in the violent days of 1817), and at a later date, a few Swiss servants added further variety to the racial conglomeration.

At that time, social conditions were deplorable and there was no effective criminal jurisdiction in the territory.

There was constant danger of Indian raids yet military protection was inadequate and the scattered community on the Red River was left pretty much to its own resources.

Such were the conditions when Rev. John West arrived at Fort Douglas on Saturday afternoon, October 14th, 1820. The following day the "servants of the Company were assembled for Divine Worship" in one of the rooms in the Fort. For many months, this rectangular Fort on the bank of the river was the only place of worship west of the Red River.

## Building the Mission

George Harbidge, a schoolmaster and also an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, had accompanied Rev. John West from England. Immediately a log house some distance down the road from the Fort was secured and converted into a temporary schoolhouse and abode for the teacher. Within two or three weeks, Mr. Harbidge was teaching some twenty to thirty children.

After two months or so, John West's own place of residence was removed from Fort Douglas to the farm of the late Earl of Selkirk some three miles distant.

While these arrangements had brought about some improvement in conditions, the plan as a whole lacked unity. John West determined therefore "to erect in a central situation a substantial building, which should contain apartments for the schoolmaster, afford accommodation for the Indian children, be a day school for the children of the settlers, enable us to establish a Sunday School for the half-caste population — and fully answer the purpose of a church for the present."

The location chosen was about a mile north of Fort Douglas on the bank of the Red River where a small stream flowed into it from the westward through what is now St. John's Park. The stream was known as "Parsonage Creek." St. John's Cathedral stands very near although not on the exact spot.

House and Qu'Appelle, on the rapidly flowing Assiniboine River, and mail transport from Montreal.

The population was truly cosmopolitan. First, there were the active and retired Officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. Then, there were the Selkirk Settlers, recent arrivals who were endeavouring to wrest a livelihood from the soil. There were some French-Canadians (descendants of voyageurs from the days of La Verendrye, a few Germans — De Meuron soldiers (brought by



John West's activities took him far afield: Three months after his arrival at the Red River Settlement, he visited Brandon House and Qu'Appelle, travelling in a carriage drawn by three wolf dogs. He slept under the open winter sky, had his nose frost-bitten, saw herds of buffalo, just escaped bands of savage Indians, witnessed the "staging of a corpse" at Brandon House and saw savages at Beaver Creek indulging in heathen revels.

In the spring, he journeyed to Pembina, where Fort Daer was famous as a place of refuge for Selkirk colonists who had fallen on evil days. There, he attended a meeting to discuss ways and means of defending the Red River Settlement, should it be attacked by Sioux Indians. Only the previous summer, a boy had been scalped not far from the settlement and a painted stick left upon the mangled body, indicating the Indians' determination to return. While at Fort Daer, he "went out with some hunters on the plains and saw them kill the buffalo." During his stay there, he preached a sermon which was listened to attentively by his mixed congregation.

By springtime, 1821, he had twelve men employed in building the Mission Schoolhouse, but work progressed slowly while he was absent at York Factory. Travelling to York Factory he met Mr. Nicholas Garry, a Director of the Hudson's Bay Company, at Norway House. Together, they continued the voyage down the river. Mr. Garry was enthusiastic about John West's plans for his Mission. At York, they formed a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the first in the North-West. Later in the year (1821) Mr. West wrote the Church Missionary Society at London, England, proposing a regular Mission in the Red River Settlement. A little later when in London, Mr. Nicholas Garry and Mr. Benjamin Harrison, of the Hudson's Bay Company, attended the Society Committee in support of the application for a Mission. As a result of these efforts Rev. John West was appointed Superintendent of the Society's Mission in the Red River District, and subsequently one of the Society's students, Rev. D. T. Jones was additionally appointed to the Mission. At the same time a substantial amount was voted by the Society as an annual grant to cover the expenses incidental to the Missionary effort. When John West returned from York, he found the Mission building far from ready and the approaching winter halted further work. Construction was resumed in the following spring of 1822 but in the meantime new quarters had to be secured for the schoolmaster and the Indian boys. Fort Garry, named after Mr. Nicholas Garry, was then built, following the amalgamation of the two great trading companies. It was destined to fill the place of both the original posts of Fort Douglas and Fort Gibraltar. John West secured a room in the New Fort for holding church services until his own Mission was ready.

CHURCH BELL, ORIGINALLY  
HUNG IN FIRST JOHN WEST  
CHURCH, 1822, NOW IN  
ST. CLEMENTS CHURCH,  
SELKIRK, MANITOBA



The little Mission upon the bank of the Red River gradually took shape and eventually the church was first used for Divine Worship in the early autumn of 1822. The Chaplaincy at the Red River had at last become firmly established. Up to now, it had existed as an undertaking of the Hudson's Bay Company on behalf of its own employees. Then a significant change took place. It now passed under the direction of the Church Missionary Society and its sphere of activities enlarged to include not only the white but native races. This change culminated mainly through the urgent appeals of John West in drawing attention to the plight of the Indians.



FIRST JOHN WEST CHURCH AT THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT, BUILT IN 1822

John West continued as Chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company but he was now to act in addition as Superintendent of the Missionary Establishment for the Church Missionary Society. Another clergyman was to work at the Society's expense under John West's direction and George Harbidge, the schoolmaster, also became an employee of the Society and assumed charge of the school. The buildings were to be enlarged, and the number of Indian children limited for the present to fifteen boys and fifteen girls. Other children were to be accepted at the expense of their parents or guardians. This plan became effective on October 1st, 1822.

Next spring, 1823, when John West was leaving the Red River, the little Mission had become an institution of considerable importance. It was the residence of the schoolmaster, George Harbidge, now happily married and assisted in teaching by his young wife. It was the home of the Indian children under the motherly care of Agathus, a half-breed woman. It was the day school for the children of the settlers and of the Hudson's Bay Company's employees. On Sundays, it attracted a congregation numbering well over 100 in the morning and Sunday school was regularly held in the afternoons. The Depository of the Auxiliary Bible Society, founded at York Factory by John West and Nicholas Garry in 1821, was now located in the Church Mission house, on the Red River. It also had cultivated plots of ground for the native children. It had a farm in charge of Mr. Samuel West who supplied the inmates of the Mission with home grown produce. Even a hunter resided there, whose duty was to provide meat. Shortly before John West left the Red River, a spire had been added to the Church Building and a bell rang out the call to Divine Worship.

He records his feelings of delight at the situation in the following words, written shortly before his leaving the Red River: "As I was returning from visiting some of the settlers about nine or ten miles below, one evening, the lengthened shadows of the setting sun cast upon the buildings, and the consideration that there was now a landmark of Christianity in this wild waste, and an asylum opened for the instruction and maintenance of Indian children, raised the most agreeable sensations in my mind, and led me into a train of thought which awakened a hope, that in the Divine compassion of the Saviour, it might be the means of raising a spiritual temple in this wilderness to the honour of His name."

While at York Factory, on his journey home, John West made a hazardous journey to Churchill to minister to the Eskimo on the Western coast of Hudson's Bay. Upon his return to York Factory, he met the clergyman who became his successor, in the person of the Rev. David T. Jones. After a few days in conference on the affairs of the Mission, the two men parted, Rev. John West to return to England and the Rev. Jones to carry on the good work at the Mission.



SECOND CHURCH, BUILT 1833, CONSECRATED  
AS FIRST ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL 1849

Rev. John West fully intended to return to the Red<sup>\*</sup>River Settlement, bringing his wife and family with him. However, he was induced by a New England Company to make a tour of inspection of Indian settlements in the Maritime Provinces and Upper Canada. After completing this mission. John West returned to England and spent his remaining years as Rector of Farnham, the scene of his childhood days. In 1834, he was appointed Chaplain to the Earl of Bessborough, then Viscount Duncannon.

He died during the Christmas season of 1845 and was buried in the churchyard at Chettle only a mile from Farnham. A window in the chancel of that Church stands to his memory but a more magnificent, more enduring memorial exists right here in the living force of Christianity in Western Canada.

In his "Journal," Rev. John West wrote of his Mission: "I consider it no small point gained to have formed a religious establishment. The outward walls, even, and the spire of the church, cannot fail of having some effect on the minds of a wandering people, and of the population of the settlement."

THIRD CHURCH AND SECOND ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL BUILDING  
COMPLETED AND CONSECRATED IN 1862



# The History of St. John's Cathedral



THE little Red River Mission House is no more. In its place, St. John's Cathedral stands as a monument to the unselfish devotion of Rev. John West, and those who followed him in the work of the Master. The present Cathedral is the third building to succeed the original Mission House and Church, on the banks of the Red River.

The first, or "John West Church," was begun in the spring of 1822, and completed in 1823. This building was of frame and log construction, with spire.

The second church was built of stone as designed by Rev. William Cochrane, the corner stone was laid by Henry Berens on May 15, 1833, and the Church was finished in 1834. There is little record of this building, a picture of which now hangs in the Cathedral vestry.

With the arrival of Bishop David Anderson, the first Bishop of Rupert's Land, in 1849, this church had the distinction of becoming the Cathedral of St. John's and the centre of the Anglican communion in the North-West Territories.

The corner stone of the third church or "Old Cathedral," was laid in 1856. This building, constructed of stone, was consecrated in 1862 by Bishop Anderson and the first service was held there on Christmas Day of that year.

"Old St. John's," as it is now familiarly called, was closed for public worship in 1913 and services were held in the Pro-Cathedral, now known as the Parish Hall, until 1926.

The fourth church, or present Cathedral, which incorporates in its walls materials used in the previous Cathedral, was dedicated on December 6th, 1926. The dedication sermon was preached by the Rev. Canon H. J. Cody, D.D., then Rector of St. Paul's Church, Toronto, Ont.

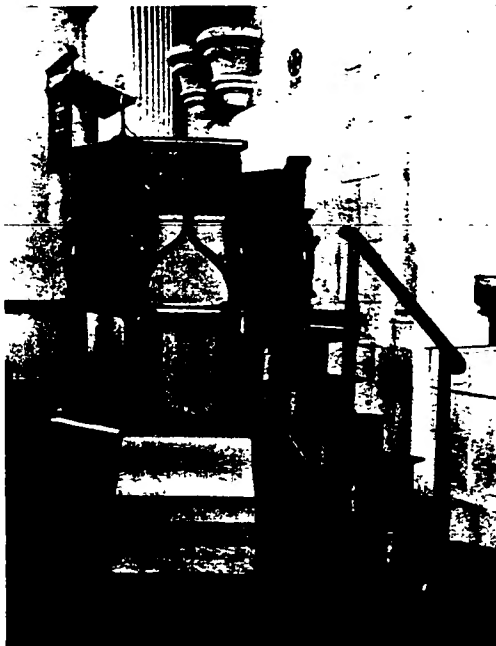
The churchyard of St. John's is the resting place of many of the early Red River Settlers and men prominent in the history of Church and State in Western Canada.

Within the Church, the visitor will find much of historic interest. The  
PRESENT BELLS OF ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL



pulpit of oak was carved about 1906 by R. Dien, a local carver of Swiss origin living within the Parish, and was given in the memory of Archbishop Robert Machray. The Reredos at the back of the altar was carved by the same craftsman.

The stained glass windows in the Cathedral are reputed to be among the most beautiful on the North American Continent. That in the Chancel contains the Coat-of-Arms of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Province of Manitoba and the several



PULPIT IN ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL

Dioceses comprising the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land and a picture of Archbishop Robert Machray.

The connection of the Church of England with the Hudson's Bay Company dates from 1820 and their early gift of land to the Church. It is interesting to note that the front pew on the north or Gospel side, has always been reserved for the use of the Company and its Officers. Besides the Memorial Plaques attached to the walls, is a Canterbury Cross above the pulpit, and a font of Italian Marble, given in memory of Bishop David Anderson. All are items of interest.

The three bells which hang in the Cathedral Tower were brought from England in 1862 by Bishop Anderson. They were granted a free passage by the Hudson's Bay Company and were first

placed in the belfry of "Old St. John's" which had then just been completed.

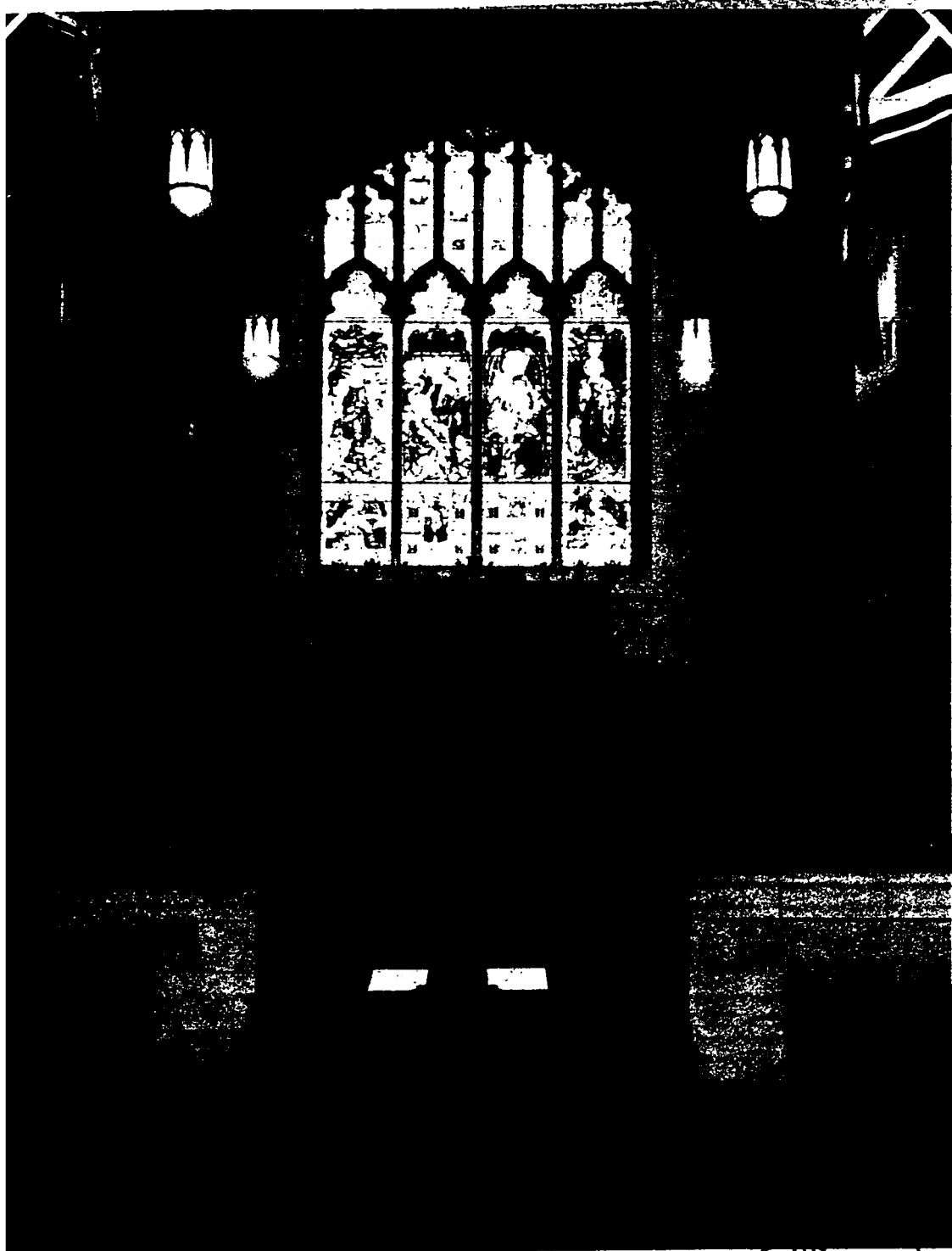
It is interesting to note the following information furnished by the Canadian Institute of Surveying in its 34th Annual Report dated February, 1941:

"Authentic reports show that the first surveyor in the District (Red River) was an Englishman, Mr. Peter Fidler (1769-1822), who was employed by the Governor of the District of Assiniboia (the name bestowed on the territory) as a surveyor at a salary of £100 per annum. . . . In 1814 he laid out lots along the Red River of which the then Lot No. 4 is now occupied by St. John's Cathedral. A total of 36 Lots were laid out in this Survey."

The aforementioned Lot No. 4, by agreement between Lord Selkirk and the Settlers, was granted by him to the Settlers "for Church and Educational purposes" and for that purpose it has, in part, been held by the Church of England in Canada to this date.

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*The Wardens and Vestry are indebted to Rev. Canon W. Bertal Heeney, B.A., D.D., Ottawa, Ontario, for information obtained from his biography of the Rev. John West, and to Mrs. Margaret Arnett MacLeod for the pictures of the bells of St. John's Cathedral, which originally appeared in her book, "The Bells of the Red River."*



CHANCEL OF ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL  
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CLERICAL AND LAY OFFICIALS OF ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL  
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RIGHT REVEREND DAVID ANDERSON, 1849-1865

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Primate

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Primate

MOST REVEREND ISAAC O. STRINGER, D.D., 1931-1934

MOST REVEREND MALCOLM MACADAM HARDING, D.D., 1934-1942

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